

Resource 12

Cross-Cultural Journal*

- Goal: To introduce participants to a learning tool they can use in cross-cultural settings to help them analyze why they react as they do to the new culture.
- Group size: Variable.
- Materials: A notebook, similar to a stenographer's notebook, in which pages are divided vertically in right and left halves.

Procedure

On the left side, participants should describe what they observe as they experience the new environment; on the right, they will record their reactions to what they see and try to analyze their observations from a cross-cultural perspective. Depending on the situation, participants could analyze a foreign culture or write an entry based on their encounter with American culture in the Martian Anthropology Exercise. While this is valuable as a self-contained, privately done exercise, it can also provide data for discussions with a "cultural informant," someone from the host culture with the ability to interpret his or her own cultural behavior and values. The following is a sample illustrating how the journal should be set up.

Date:

Location:

OBSERVATION/DESCRIPTION

On this side of the journal, describe what you saw. Anything that strikes you as different, funny, weird, sad, etc. is appropriate. Feelings, emotions, judgments should not be expressed on this side. Just stick to the facts.

OPINION/ANALYSIS

On this side of the journal, describe your thoughts, feelings, etc. about the event. Then try to analyze why you feel this way. What in your cultural makeup may be affecting how you feel? How is that different from whatever values or assumptions may be at work in the new culture?

The following is a sample drawn from the Martian Anthropology Exercise (Resource 11).

Date: January 5

Location: Commerce Bank

OBSERVATION/DESCRIPTION

People enter the bank and fill out forms. They hand these to a person behind a counter, who processes them and provides paper vouchers, which are later used in exchange for goods and services in the community.

OPINION/ANALYSIS

The bank is this society's educational institution. The people are students, and the forms they fill out constitute exams or reports, which are passed along to the teacher. There is a direct relationship in this society between educational excellence and society at large; students are rewarded immediately and in a very concrete fashion.

The following is an unedited journal entry from a Japanese student analyzing American culture.

Date: Sept. 9

Location: At my host family's house

OBSERVATION/DESCRIPTION

This morning I had to go to school at 8:10, but I could not hear my alarm clock ringing at 6:40, so I overslept until 8:00. My host mother did not wake me up though she heard the alarm clock's sound.

OPINION/ANALYSIS

She was very unkind to me. Maybe she doesn't care if I have many difficulties at school. I felt loneliness. In Japan, people help each other. We always take care of our families and always take care of our friends even if they are grown-up persons. To take care of each other is a most important value for us. Host mother said in the evening, "Next time if you don't wake up, what should I do? I respected your privacy this morning." Her words were very impressive to me. I understood her attitude represented the important American values: individualism and privacy. Maybe she also wanted me to learn "self-help" and "time control" to survive in America.

The following unedited journal entry is from a Chinese international student.

Date: Sept. 1

Location: classroom

OBSERVATION/DESCRIPTION

Some American students prop their feet on the chairs or desks and eat and drink when they are in class.

OPINION/ANALYSIS

I am uncomfortable to see American students' liberal behavior in class. In class, they do as they do at home. In China, every student tries to sit still, keep feet on the floor, no food or drink while in class. Because fathers and teachers taught us to behave. If you brought your breakfast to eat in class, the teacher would point to you coldly and say, "Please don't eat; otherwise, you interfere with other students." Even once one classmate was late for surgery class in my Chinese Med. School. He was pushed out of the classroom as soon as he stepped into the room. It is no way to break the classroom manner. Coming from China, I was amazed to see what American students do. They are less controlled. They do what they enjoy. Maybe they consider it to be freedom. They thought they come to school for knowledge, not restrictions. Whether you achieve in class or not has nothing to do with class conduct. That is the way they live—individual freedom under no restrictions.

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